

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 0580

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CE

SUBJ: SECRETARY'S VISIT TO SOUTH ASIA; PROPOSED STOP IN
SRI LANKA (CEYLON)

REF STATE 37015

1. BECUASE OF UNCERTAINTIES CONNECTED WITH SECRETARY'S PROPOSED VISIT TO INDIA, WE HAVE HERETOFORE HELD OFF SUGGESTING THAT SECRETARY VISIT SRI LANKA IN CONNECTION WITH THAT TRIP. HOWEVER, WITH COMPLETION SECRETARY'S MIDDLE EAST TRIP, ACTIVE CONSIDERATION MAY NOW BE BEING GIVEN TO POSSIBILITY OF VISIT TO NEW DELHI IN SECOND HALF MARCH, AS WELL AS TO POSSIBILITY OF ADDITIONAL STOPS WHICH WERE ALLUDED TO BY UNDER SECRETARY SISCO IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH INDIAN AMBASSADOR (REFTEL).

2. IF DELHI TRIP DOES MATERIALIZE, WE HOPE CONSIDERATION ALSO WILL BE GIVEN TO VISIT TO SRI LANKA, EVEN IF LIMITED TO SHORT REST STOP. VISIT WOULD PAY HEAVY DIVIDENDS HERE FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

A) BRIEF STOP HERE, WITHOUT RAISING UNDUE EXPECTATIONS ON EITHER SIDE, WOULD SIGNAL CONTINUED US INTEREST IN SRI LANKA WHERE PORT OF COLOMGO REMAINS OPEN TO CAREFULLY TIMED AND CONTROLLED US NAVAL VISITS. IT WOULD THUS HELP TO REINFORCE POSITIVE EVOLUTION IN US-SRI LANKA RELATIONS, REFLECTED MOST RECENTLY IN GSL'S
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CIRCUMSPECT AND RELATIVELY SUBDUED HANDLING OF SENSITIVE

DIEGO GARCIA ISSUE.

B) SRI LANKA IS ONLY COUNTRY IN SOUTH ASIA WHICH HAS NOT BEEN VISITED BY ANY SENIOR MEMBER OF NIXON ADMINISTRATION AND MRS BANDARANAIKE WOULD WELCOME SECRETARY'S VISIT IN CONTEXT HER EFFORT TO MAINTAIN BALANCED, NON-ALIGNED POSITION VIS-A-VIS USSR, PRC, AND UNITED STATES. IN THIS CONNECTION, VISIT WOULD BE FAVORABLY INTERPRETED AS FORM OF RECIPORCATION FOR MRS BANDARANAIKE'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN 1971.

C) PRIMARY VALUE OF VISIT WOULD LIE IN ITS POLITICAL SYMBOLISM, BOTH TO GSL AND USG. BUT IN ADDITION, PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE, WHO IS STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, WOULD BENEFIT GREATLY FROM SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRETARY ON US POLICY TOWARD SOUTH ASIA AND INDIAN OCEAN.

3. IF VISIT TREATED PRIMARILY AS REST STOP, OFFICIAL ACTIVITIES COULD BE LIMITED TO CALL ON PRIME MINISTER AND POSSIBLY LUNCH BY PM (ALTHOUGH LATTER COULD PROBABLY BE DISPENSED WITH IF DESIRED). BALANCE OF TIME COULD BE DEVOTED TO REST AND RECREATION. ONLY CAVEAT ON TIMING IS THAT GSL IS HOSTING LARGE ECAFE CONFERENCE MARCH 26-APRIL 6. GSL MIGHT BE HARD PUT TO HANDLE TWO MAJOR EVENTS AT SAME TIME, BUT WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ACCOMMODATE TO THE SECRETARY'S TIME-TABLE.
VAN HOLLEN

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